

The Double-Edged Sword: The Effects of Journalists' Social Media Activities on Audience Perceptions of Journalists and Their News Products

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As social media become popular news platforms, journalists and news organizations have been keen to capitalize on their potential to build and maintain audiences. However, little is known about the extent to which these efforts may have adverse implications. Based on normative theories, the present study investigates the influence of journalists' social media activities (specifically, self-disclosure and interaction with other users) on audience perceptions of journalists. An experiment (N = 267) revealed that: Although both journalists' self-disclosure and interaction positively influenced audience perceptions of the journalists in the personal dimension, interaction negatively influenced audience perceptions in the professional dimension; and the perceptions transferred to perceptions of news products, thereby mediating the relationship between journalists' social media activities and audience news perceptions.

Keywords: Social Media, Social-Networking Sites, Perception, Norm, Objectivity, Journalist, News, Uncertainty Reduction, Expectancy Violation.

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Americans' news environments are changing rapidly with the diffusion of digital media. One of the most notable trends is the explosion of social media such as Facebook and Twitter as news platforms. Social media offer opportunities for news organizations to reach more people than ever before (Pew Research, 2014b). For young people, in particular, social media news feeds, not news websites, are their major news sources (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012; Pew Research, 2013; Stassen, 2010). Increasingly, people consume the news by liking or following journalists or news organizations on Facebook or Twitter (Hermida et al., 2012; Pew Research, 2014b). As of 2013, 67% of those who use Facebook at least an hour a day, which amounts to 30% of the U.S. population, get news through Facebook (Pew Research, 2013).

For journalists, social media have become powerful tools to capture information flow, gauge public opinion, and disseminate news, particularly in crisis situations (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014;

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Knight & Cook, 2013; Vis, 2013). Individual journalists increasingly create their own social media pages for public consumption to promote their news products and build personal brands. Some news organizations encourage their staff journalists to engage in social media to expand readership, raise brand awareness, and increase their website traffic (Gleason, 2010; Hermida, 2013). Keeping pace with the trend, journalism schools integrate social media components into their academic curricula (Cochrane, Sissons, Mulrennan, & Pamatatau, 2012).

This new environment where social media function as news platforms provides an interesting context to examine. In particular, today's social media users experience news as not just mass communication but "masspersonal" communication (O'Sullivan, 2005) through which they can build interpersonal relationships with news sources. This masspersonal perspective is useful to understand current news users' points of view. Although a significant amount of research has provided insights into the role of social media in journalism (e.g., Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013; Hermida, 2013; Hermida et al., 2014; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012; Vis, 2013), both journalism and computer-mediated communication (CMC) literature are lacking in the masspersonal approach. Most studies heavily rely on theories of mass communication while failing to consider relevant interpersonal communication theories. In addition, few empirical studies have scrutinized the implications of journalists' social media activities for audience perceptions of journalists. Given the growing adoption rate of social media among journalists, it is crucial to know how journalists who used to be exclusive senders in mass communication processes are perceived by social media users when they behave like ordinary CMC partners.

Based on interpersonal and normative theories, the present study aims to fill in the gaps in the literature by investigating the influence of journalists' social media activities (i.e., self-disclosure and interaction) on audience perceptions of journalists, and if the social media activities indirectly influence news perceptions through journalist perceptions. Taking the approach of social information processing theory (Walther, 1992), this study views journalists' social media activity as a mix of interpersonal communication and mass communication through which audiences form impressions of journalists and their news products.

Traditional Journalism Norms

The traditional role of journalists as outlined within normative theories is to provide objective and accurate reporting without distorting or intervening in the news (McQuail, 2010). Since the appearance of modern newspapers in the Jacksonian Era of the 1830s, the objectivity norm has prevailed in American journalistic professionalism, boosted by Lippmann (1922) who argued for the need to apply the scientific method to news reporting. Objectivity has been referred to as "the emblem" (Schudson, 1978, p. 9), "cornerstone principle" (Muñoz-Torres, 2012), "one of the identifying features of journalism in the U.S." and "perhaps the major contribution American journalism has made to the rest of the world" (Rosen, 1993).

It should be noted that objectivity is an ever-evolving, elusive concept (Streckfuss, 1990; Muñoz-Torres, 2012) and differently interpreted or valued depending on regions and cultures (Donsbach & Klett, 1993; Ward, 2010). In the U.S., it has been mainly understood as a synonym for neutrality or for the separation of facts from values or opinions (Schudson, 1978). Schudson defines the belief in objectivity as "a faith in facts," "a distrust of values," and "a commitment to their segregation." In a nutshell, it suggests that journalists should "keep themselves aside" when relaying the facts (Muñoz-Torres, 2012). According to this perspective, a journalist functions as a nonpartial mediator between real-world events and the public (Ruigrok, 2008). On the other hand, values, "an individual's conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world should be" (Schudson, 1978, p.6), are ultimately subjective and should be separated from facts.

Another major characteristic of objective journalism is detachment from the source, publishers, commercial or political interests, and certain classes of audiences such as the elite (Mindich, 2000; Rosen, 1993). The underlying idea of this detachment is that journalists should not serve particular groups of people; journalists should not reflect some people's interests more than others. When journalists build a personal relationship with their sources, it can affect their news selection or tone whether they are conscious of it or not. During the War in Iraq, for instance, embedded journalists depicted the U.S. invasion of Iraq and individual troops in a more favorable tone toward the military compared to nonembedded journalists (Pfau et al., 2004). This detachment norm also applies to the news reporting process; for the objective image, only the final news products go public. Few concrete details about the processes of information gathering and decision-making are disclosed (Karlsson, 2011). According to Meyrowitz (1985), "in general, whatever dimensions of the rehearsal become visible to the audience must be integrated into the show itself; whatever backstage time and space remain hidden can still be used to perfect the performance" (p.47). Journalistic independence is acknowledged as a necessary condition of detachment, and the detachment norm gives journalists a certain level of trust and authority (McQuail, 2010).

Although critics increasingly argue that objectivity is a "myth" or an "ill-conceived," "outdated concept" (e.g., Muñoz-Torres, 2012; Rosen, 1993; Sullivan, 2013a; 2013b), and scholars from the public journalism paradigms argue that it is both impossible to achieve and/or less important than journalism's mission of public service (Ruigrok, 2008), the objectivity standard has been one of the dominant ideals for a journalist who invokes "ideas of professionalism" (Tuchman, 1972, p.660) and the most central concept in media theory relating to information quality (McQuail, 2010). Such norms as impartiality, detachment, balance, and accuracy were associated with such professional qualities of journalists as credibility (Holbert & Zubric, 2000) and competence (Himmelboim & Limor, 2011). According to Burgoon's (1993) expectancy violation theory, people form expectancies primarily based upon social norms and specific characteristics of the communicators and react to others' behaviors that violate their expectancies. Journalists who behave in an unexpected manner can violate audience expectancies and evoke audiences' positive or negative reactions. When journalists' news stories are judged as lacking objectivity, for instance, their qualities as professionals can become a target of criticism.

Social Media Norms

Journalism is in a state of flux at present. Although the objectivity norm is still alive and well in textbooks, journalism standards and practices seem to be moving away from the strict impartiality and detachment principles toward new paradigms of transparency and public engagement with the rise of new media, particularly social media (Hermida, 2013; Lasorsa, 2012). The use of interactive media is driven not only by informational needs (e.g., surveillance) but also by social utility such as self-expression and social interaction (James, Wotring, & Forrest, 1995; Trammell, 2005). As for social media use, entertainment/escape, self-status seeking, social interaction and information seeking have been identified as major motivations (Johnson & Yang, 2009; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Focusing on interpersonal motivations, Nadkarni & Hofmann (2012) suggest the need for self-presentation and the need to belong as two primary needs that drive social media use. Driven by the two needs are the two common social media activities: self-disclosure and interaction with other users.

Self-disclosure is defined as a verbal revelation of personal information including thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993) that the receiver is unlikely to hear from someone else (Waring, 1990). It has been identified as one of the core indicators of the development of a relationship (Derlega et al., 1993; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000) that significantly correlates with liking

(Collins & Miller, 1994). Revealing personal thoughts and feelings is generally taken as a positive sign that the communicator is willing to reach out to the message receiver, which encourages the receiver's compensational self-disclosure. According to Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory, people need information about the other party in order to reduce their uncertainty that generates cognitive stress and increase predictability of others' behaviors, which is crucial in the development of any relationship (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger, 1986).

Social media users have a higher propensity for self-disclosure than other media users (Acquisti, Gritzalis, Lambrinoudakis, & di Vimercati, 2007; Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008); they do not appear to be highly concerned about the possible negative repercussions of sharing their personal information with other users (Barns, 2006). The default settings of Facebook such as public display of status updates and comments encourage users to reveal their personalities and daily activities through their shared news feeds. As norms are learned from observing behaviors of others, social media users who are exposed to others' personalized content tend to follow suit (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2009).

The other primary need for social media use, the need to belong, is likely to be fulfilled through interactive communications among users. In particular, providing feedback is an essential component of interactivity (Sims, 2003). Feedback is important as it turns a one-way communication to a reciprocal one. It means that the receiver of a message is not just a passive audience but an active communicator whose response can build further communication.

Social media constitute a highly interactive platform via which individuals and communities cocreate and discuss content by exchanging messages and comments (Kietzmann & Hermkens, 2011). The core features such as sharing, commenting, and "liking" make interaction easy. On an average day, 44% of Facebook users "like" others' content, and 31% comment on others' photos (Pew Research, 2014a). By providing such feedback, the communicator can give a sense of social presence so the receivers feel as if they are having direct, face-to-face conversations (Lee & Shin, 2012). As interaction is a commonly expected and preferred behavior by social media users, even politicians' social media feedback, whose purpose is quite obvious, elicits positive reactions such as higher evaluation and stronger intention to vote for the politician (Lee & Shin, 2012). Van Elsas (2008) explains that:

Web technology has brought us the ability to interact at zero cost. [...] Let's assume that [...] we express ourselves but no one is listening. I bet that the phenomenon would die out very quickly. It isn't the expressing your thoughts that makes social media tick. [...] It is the "social" dimension of it that matters most. The ability to react, to agree or disagree, to build further, the sharing of experiences in order to learn from each other, to have fun, to argue or fight, in other words, it is interaction that matters.

The association between self-disclosure and interaction seems to be circular; self-disclosure stimulates responses from others and thus gives rise to further interaction (Ko & Pu, 2011), and social interaction constitutes an underlying drive and reward for self-disclosure (Papacharissi, 2002; Van Elsas, 2008).

Clash of Journalism Norms and Social Media Norms

Social media have given rise to heated discussions over how journalists should use the media (e.g., Fisher, 2010; Sullivan, 2013a; 2013b), mainly resulting from the clash of social media norms and the traditional journalism norms. As social media users, journalists are subject to the influence of social media norms such as personality disclosure and interaction. A study analyzing the tweets (Twitter posts) of the 500 most followed professional journalists found that their tweets commonly

included links (42%), personal life stories (20.2%), opinions (15.7%), information with at least an element of opinion (27%), retweets (15.2%), and discussions (14.9%) (Lasorsa et al., 2012). Journalists also give feedback to audiences' comments in public; individual journalists' social media profiles tend to be more interactive and personal than the profiles of newspaper organizations (Canter, 2013). These findings indicate that journalists' social media uses do not differ greatly from those of other users in offering personal thoughts and opinion and inviting more engagement with audiences.

According to the uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), self-disclosing and interactive behaviors are believed to have positive effects on personal impressions because information about the other party gained through reciprocal, interactive behaviors reduce uncertainties and heighten social presence. These positive effects can apply to journalists. Social information processing (SIP) theory claims that computer-mediated communication users can form impressions of distant others by accumulating and utilizing available information in the environment as they do in face-to-face environments (Walther, 1992). To make sense of unknown profile owners, social media users tend to take cues not only from their postings but also from the comment section (Lee & Lim, 2014). By revealing personal charms and by taking part in friendly interaction with other users through social media, journalists may establish relationships with audiences and secure brand loyalty (Broersma & Graham, 2011; Dickinson, 2011). American journalist Nicholas Kristof at *The New York Times* is an example of such journalists who gained popularity by actively publishing from conflict zones or from homes. Kristof expresses his opinions through his Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus pages and a YouTube channel, and has the most Twitter followers (almost 1.51 million) among print journalists.

However, self-disclosure and interaction are typically known to help achieve interpersonal goals rather than professional goals. Those social media behaviors may present a journalist as a nice and friendly person, but at the same time, those can be seen as a violation of professionalism that traditionally requires journalists to be neutral and detached (Molyneux & Holton, 2014). Social-media-active journalists tend to deviate from traditional norms (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013), and audiences may take the deviation as a sign of unprofessionalism. Borrowing Singer's (2005) expression, any journalist who uses social media may confront "challenges to professional norms as a nonpartisan gatekeeper of information" (p.174). Because of that, New York Times Public Editor Margaret Sullivan called social media a "double-edged sword" (Sims, 2013). According to the expectancy violation theory, such departure from the norm can result in negative consequences at least in the professional dimension (Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon & Walther, 1990; Sims, 2013). According to Gillin (2011), a journalist's ability to behave in an impartial manner is regarded as a "core skill of the profession" and its violation raises doubts about a reporter's objectivity in the minds of readers and sources. As the objectivity norm still is the defining feature of the professional journalist in the U.S. and Canada (Ward, 2005), audiences may apply it when they evaluate journalists as professionals whereas they apply general social media norms to other users. Overall, journalists' social media activities are likely to result in very different audience perceptions of journalists depending on the dimension of focus, whether it is the personal dimension or the professional dimension. In turn, the perceptions are likely to influence audience perceptions of the journalists' news products.

Hypotheses

First, a journalist who reveals him- or herself through social media are expected to be seen in a positive light (i.e., more attractive, trustworthy, and caring) by other social media users in the personal dimension. Thus, the following set of hypotheses is posited:



Figure 1 The simple mediation model from journalists' social media activities to audiences' perceptions

H1: Audiences exposed to a journalist's self-disclosure (a) and interaction with other audiences (b) via social media perceive the journalist more positively in the personal dimension than those who are not exposed to the self-disclosure and interaction.

Journalists cannot be thought of separately from the news they produce. Information given by a reliable source is typically seen as to be more credible and to have more influence than information from a less reliable source (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Audiences cued by source credibility tend to accept or reject a message more readily (Slater & Rouner, 1996). Therefore, it is expected that audiences view a news product positively when it is produced by a person they view positively, which posits the following hypothesis:

H2: Audience perceptions of a journalist positively predict audience perceptions of the journalist's news product in the personal dimension.

Given H1 and H2, it is reasonable to test if the effects of journalists' social media activities on audiences' news perception are mediated through their perception of journalists (see Figure 1). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:

H3: The effect of a journalist's self-disclosure (a) and interaction with audiences (b) on audience perceptions of the journalist's news product in the personal dimension is mediated by audience perceptions of the journalist.

Although journalists' social media activities can be personally favored by other social media users, the expectancy violation theory suggests that their professional images (i.e., perceived competence) might be negatively affected as the violation of professional journalism norms. Thus, the following set of hypotheses is posited:

H4: Audiences exposed to a journalist's self-disclosure (a) and interaction with audiences (b) via social media perceive the journalist more negatively in the professional dimension than those who are not exposed to the self-disclosure and interaction.

As in the personal dimension, audience perceptions of a journalist in the professional dimension are expected to affect audience perceptions of his or her news products, thereby mediating the relationship between the journalist's social media activities and news perceptions. Thus, the following set of hypotheses is posited:

H5: Audience perceptions of a journalist in the professional dimension positively predict audience perception of the journalist's news product in the professional dimension.

H6: The effect of a journalist's self-disclosure (a) and interaction on audience (b) via social media on audience perceptions of the journalist's news product in the professional dimension is mediated by audience perceptions of the journalist.

Method

Study Design

An online experiment was conducted in a 2 (self-disclosure: low vs. high) x 2 (interaction: low vs. high) between-subject factorial design. Low and high self-disclosure and interaction were operationalized through a mock Facebook profile of a fictitious journalist named David Miller that was shown to participants as a stimulus.

Participants

The data were collected in February and March, 2013. 267 undergraduate students of a large university in the Midwestern United States registered in non-journalism communication classes voluntarily participated in the experiment for extra course credit. The average participant was 21.3 years old ($SD = 4.3$). There were more females (65.2%) than males, and more whites (82.8%) than non-whites (17.2%). There was a nearly even distribution across Democrats (35.5%), Republicans (31.1%), and independents (33.3%).

Procedure

Participants accessed the online experiment site by clicking on the "I agree" button on an electronic consent form, and they were randomly assigned into one of the four self-disclosure-by-interaction conditions and exposed to a stimulus profile. Then, they were asked to fill out an online questionnaire on the next page which was made of a set of semantic differential scales about David Miller (profile owner). Whenever they were ready, participants could proceed to the next page where they were given the full text of the news article that was posted on Miller's profile. After reading the article, participants filled out a similar questionnaire. This time, it was about how they perceived the article, not the journalist. On the last page, participants provided information about their demographics and individual characteristics.

Stimuli

Differing versions of a mock Facebook profile of Miller were created and the screenshot of each profile's top part was used as a stimulus (see Figure 2 & 3 for examples). In the screenshot, participants could see two news links Miller posted and the leads of the articles, and two readers' comments underneath each post. Instead of a real profile photo, a cartoon image was used with a written explanation that the real photo was replaced with the image "for privacy purposes."

While the basic settings of the Facebook profile were kept the same, only the second news article and the experimental conditions (i.e., journalist's self-disclosure and interaction with audiences) were manipulated. The first article that was common to all conditions (i.e., light entertainment news about best car chase movie ranking) was allegedly from AP News. The second article was seemingly written by Miller himself according to the byline. For better generalizability of the research, four different news stories were randomly used for Miller's article in each condition. Two articles covered economic and less-political news (i.e., student financial aid policy, job market) and the other two covered politically polarized, controversial partisan issues (i.e., immigration, gun control). All articles were written and

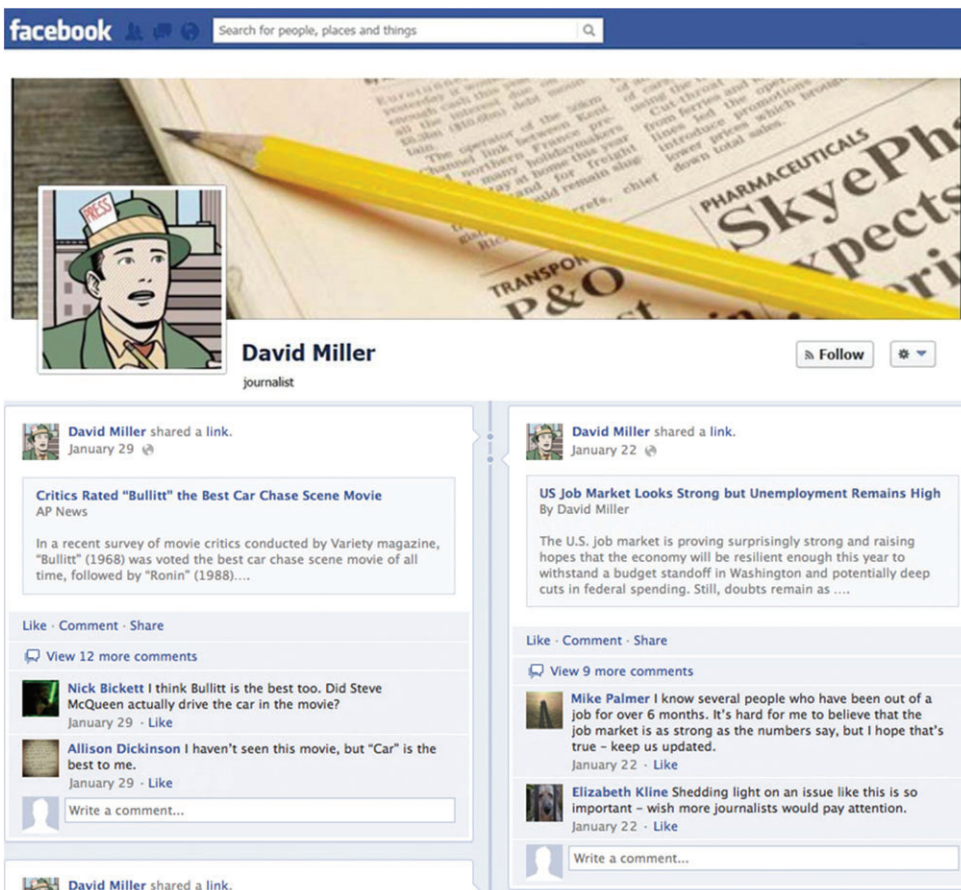


Figure 2 The low disclosure & low interaction condition stimulus for the job market article

edited by two journalism professors who were former newspaper journalists. The length and the tone of the four articles were kept similar with two opposing sides' views, if any, evenly reflected. The result of analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the differences in stories (i.e., topics) did not make a significant difference in audiences' journalist or news evaluations. Thus, the four article condition cells were ultimately collapsed in the final analyses.

Self-disclosure conditions

For the high self-disclosure condition, Miller added his personal thoughts and feelings about the two visible news posts. For the car chase scene article, he posted: "I cannot agree more with this result. 'Bullitt' is my dad's all-time favorite and we both loved the 390 Mustang racing down the streets of San Francisco [...]" The second article also contained personal comments. For the student financial aid policy news, which was one of the four stimuli, he added: "As I am from a low/middle-income family and have benefitted from Pell Grants to earn my undergraduate degree, any news regarding student financial aid policies always gets my attention." None of the comments from Miller explicitly revealed his position on the issue on news, but audiences could possibly read into the comments and interpret those as



Figure 3 The high disclosure & high interaction stimulus for the job market article

they wanted to. In the low self-disclosure condition, only news links were posted without any additional thought disclosure.

Interaction conditions

For the high-interaction condition, all readers' comments were given individual feedback by Miller. In addition, all visible readers' comments were "liked" presumably by him. The number of hidden comments was marked as 24 for the movie article (i.e., "View 24 more comments.") and as 18 for the other article, which was the double of 12 and 9 in the low-interaction condition, implying all the comments were responded to by Miller. He also encouraged audiences' participation by adding a question such as

“Do you agree?” “What do you think about [the issue]?” In the low-interaction condition, no feedback or question was provided by Miller. Manipulation check results showed that 76% and 79% of participants correctly recognized whether Miller wrote about his personal thoughts and feelings (self-disclosure) and give feedback to commenters (interaction), respectively, after seeing the screenshot.

Measures

The independent variables of this study, self-disclosure and interaction, were operationalized as experimental conditions through screenshot images. The dependent and control variables (i.e., topic interest, knowledge, media bias perception) were measured by participants' responses. Among the initial five control variables, ideology and online news use had no significant effect on any of the outcome variables and, thus, were excluded to the final analyses to avoid losing statistical power.

Audience perceptions

The outcome variables were first, audience perceptions of David Miller and, second, the perceptions of his news product (i.e., article). These were measured in the personal and professional dimensions, separately, by asking participants to rate Miller and his article after each stimulus exposure. The personal-dimension perception, to cover such personal aspects as attractiveness, trustworthiness and caring, was measured with a 14-item index composed of 11-point bipolar scales ranging from 0 to 1 (i.e., attractive, appealing, approachable, friendly, honest, trustworthy, reliable, sincere, considerate, thoughtful, can be trusted, caring, concerned with people, respect readers; Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$, $M = 6.9$, $SD = 1.7$ for journalist, $\alpha = .93$, $M = 6.6$, $SD = 1.6$ for news product). The professional-dimension index was measured with a 5-item index of competence (i.e., competent, trained, informed, qualified, professional; Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$, $M = 6.9$, $SD = 1.7$ for journalist, $\alpha = .90$, $M = 5.3$, $SD = 1.7$ for news product). These perception measures were created to tap into various dimensions of journalist and news evaluations by combining existing credibility items and testing reliability and internal factor structure based on Cronbach's reliability test and exploratory factor analysis.

Topic interest

Participants might rate the journalist and the article highly mainly because they were interested in the topic of the article. Their initial interest level was measured with an index of three items asking how important, relevant and how much concern the topic was to them on an 11-point scale that ranged from 0 to 1 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$; $M = .72$, $SD = .19$).

Knowledge of current affairs

A set of political (i.e., majority party in the U.S. House, job title of Eric Holder) and social and cultural questions (i.e., the Pope's resignation, recent Academy Awards winners) were created and used as an index of current affair knowledge that ranged from 0 (those who got all questions wrong) to 1 (those who got all right). The average participant got half right (Cronbach's $\alpha = .43$; $M = .50$, $SD = .29$).

Media bias perception

To control participants' initial media trust levels, participants were asked to rate how biased they thought the news media in the U.S. were on a 5-point item ranging from “not biased (0)” to “severely biased (1).” The average participant thought the media were a little biased ($M = .72$ (.8 = “biased, but not severely”), $SD = .19$).

Table 1 Hierarchical regression of self-disclosure and interaction predicting audience perceptions of journalists and their news products in the personal dimension ($n = 267$)

	Journalist Personal			Article Personal		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Controls						
Constant	-.15+	(.09)	.09	-.10	(.08)	.25
Topic interest	.17+	(.09)	.06	.20*	(.08)	.01
Knowledge	-.05	(.06)	.37	-.11*	(.05)	.03
Media bias	-.06	(.10)	.57	.02	(.09)	.83
Predictors						
Self-disclosure	.13*	(.03)	.03	-.04	(.03)	.60
Interaction	.31***	(.03)	.000	.17***	(.03)	.004
Mediator						
Personal journalist perception	-	-	-	.32***	(.06)	.000
Model <i>F</i>	7.50***			7.87***		
Model <i>R</i>²	.13			.15		

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; # $p < .10$

Results

A set of regression analyses and mediation tests was performed using a SPSS-based macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2012). The first set of hypotheses (H1–H3) assesses audience perceptions in the personal dimension. H1 predicted positive effects of journalists' social media activities. A hierarchical multiple regression result indicated that self-disclosure (a) and interaction (b) indeed significantly and positively influenced personal-dimension perceptions, $b = .13$, $SE = .03$, $p < .05$, and $b = .31$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$, respectively, with the influences of topic interest, knowledge, and media bias perception controlled (see Table 1). Thus, both H1a and H1b were supported.

H2 predicted a positive effect of journalist personal perceptions on news product perceptions in the personal dimension. The prediction was supported after the control variables as well as self-disclosure and interaction were controlled, $b = .32$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$. Among control variables, topic interest and knowledge were also significant predictors of news product personal perception, $b = .20$, $SE = .08$, $p < .05$, and $b = -.11$, $SE = .05$, $p < .05$, respectively. Audiences perceived news products more positively in the personal dimension the more interested they were in the topic of the news journalists wrote about, and the less knowledgeable about current affairs.

H3 examined if the effect of self-disclosure (a) and interaction (b) on personal-dimension news perception was significantly mediated by personal-dimension journalist perception. The bootstrap-based mediation analysis revealed that 95% confidential interval of the indirect effect ranged from .002 to .041 with a point estimate of the indirect effect of .02, $b_{\text{IndirectEffect}} = .02$, $\text{bootstrap } SE = .01$, $\text{bootstrap } CI = [.002, .041]$, $F = 7.87$, $R^2 = .15$. The 95% confidential interval of the indirect effect of journalist interaction on personal-dimension news perception through personal-dimension journalist perception ranged from .020 to .079, with a point estimate of the indirect effect of .05, $b = .02$, $SE = .02$,

Table 2 Hierarchical regression of self-disclosure and interaction predicting audience perceptions of journalists and their news products in the professional dimension

	Journalist Professional			Article Professional		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Controls						
Constant	-.03	(.04)	.42	-.02	(.03)	.61
Topic interest	-.04	(.04)	.35	.02	(.03)	.59
Knowledge	.04+	(.02)	.09	.002	(.02)	.93
Media bias	.07	(.04)	.10	.01	(.03)	.79
Predictors						
Self-disclosure	-.05	(.01)	.40	.01	(.01)	.83
Interaction	-.13*	(.01)	.04	-.14*	(.01)	.02
Mediator						
Professional journalist perception	-	-	-	.36***	(.05)	.000
Model <i>F</i>	2.67*			7.82***		
Model <i>R</i>²	.05			.15		

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; # $p < .10$

Correction made after online publication February 24, 2015: Table 2 has been updated.

$CI = [.020, .079]$, $F = 7.87$, $R^2 = .15$. Thus, both H3a and H3b were supported. No significant direct effect of self-disclosure was found, $b = -.04$, $SE = .03$, $p = .18$, and $b = .04$, $SE = .03$, $p = .16$, respectively, indicating complete (as opposed to partial) mediations.

The next set of hypotheses of this study (H4–H6) focused on audience perceptions in the professional dimension. H4 predicted that negative effects of journalists' self-disclosure (a) and interaction (b) on professional-dimension journalist perception. A hierarchical regression demonstrated that whereas the perception was significantly and negatively influenced by interaction, $b = -.13$, $SE = .01$, $p < .05$, it was not significantly affected by self-disclosure, $b = -.05$, $SE = .01$, $p = .40$ (see Table 2). Thus, H4a was not supported. H4b was supported.

H5 examined the relationship between journalist perception and news perception in the professional dimension. The result indicated that professional-dimension journalist perception was a significant, positive predictor of professional-dimension news perception, $b = .36$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$. Thus, H5 was supported.

H6 hypothesized the mediation of journalist perception between journalists' social media activities and news perception in the professional dimension. The test of H4a already indicated there was no significant relationship between self-disclosure and professional-dimension journalist perception. There was no indirect path from self-disclosure through journalist perception in this dimension, $b_{\text{IndirectEffect}} = -.003$, $SE = .04$, $CI = [-.012, .005]$, $F = 7.82$, $R^2 = .15$. Thus, H6a was not supported. H6b looked at the indirect effect of interaction on professional-dimension news perception through journalist perception. The bootstrap analysis demonstrated that the indirect effect was significant and negative as predicted, $b_{\text{IndirectEffect}} = -.01$, $SE = .005$, $CI = [-.019, -.001]$, $F = 7.82$, $R^2 = .15$, thereby supporting H6b. Interaction's direct effect on news product perceptions was marginally significant, $b = -.02$, $SE = .01$, $p = .09$.

Discussion

The present study addresses how journalists' self-disclosure and interaction affect audience perceptions, hypothesizing positive effects in personal-dimension perceptions and negative effects in professional-dimension perceptions. The results show that journalists' social media activities did significantly affect young audience's perceptions. The effect was particularly strong in the personal dimension; as the uncertainty reduction theory predicted, the journalists who revealed their personalities and interacted with audiences via social media were regarded more positively than those who did not engage in those activities while posting news links. On the other hand, journalists' online interaction with audiences had a significantly negative effect on audience perceptions in the professional dimension. This finding demonstrates that social media are indeed a double-edged sword which represents both opportunity and problem. Whereas journalists who actively gave feedback to commenters were seen as more personally likable, when it comes to professional perceptions, they looked significantly less professional than those who did not provide feedback. According to the expectancy violation theory, this result might indicate that journalists' active liking and chatting on social media sites violate professional expectations of audiences. It is not clear why the negative reaction was not found relative to self-disclosure. It seems audiences still accept journalists who reveal personal thoughts to be competent as long as they are not caught exchanging trivial messages with other social media users in public. This might be because audiences frequently have seen journalists commenting on news or discussing issues on TV whereas they are not used to seeing journalists publicly chatting with ordinary people. It may be because the leisurely conversation sounds the "unprofessionalism" alarm to audiences. These findings indicate that social media users form impressions of an unknown person based on cues available in the environment, which is consistent with SIP perspective.

Second, the results show that perceptions of journalists significantly influence perceptions of their news products above and beyond the influences of topic interest, knowledge, and media bias perception; when a journalist is seen positively or negatively for whatever reason, his or her news products are evaluated similarly based on the impression of the journalist. The role of perceptions of journalists as the mediator between journalists' social media activities and audience news perception was significant for both self-disclosure and interaction in the personal dimension, and for interaction in the professional dimension. Overall, the results demonstrated that the influences of journalists' social media activities on journalists' perceptions went all the way to news perceptions.

While providing guidance into the dynamics through which journalists' social media activities affect audience perceptions, the present study is not without limitations. First, the participants of this study consisted entirely of young American students. Care should be taken when applying the results of this study to different age or cultural groups because the results may vary depending on how social media savvy participants are or what stance they take on journalism norms. The student sample works here because the main focus of this study was to see the reactions of the young, social media-savvy generation to the stimuli and make causal inferences. However, it is possible that the participants recruited from non-journalism communication courses are still different from other young people in terms of their tendency to rate journalists and news. Future studies are encouraged to replicate this study with different samples.

Second, because the design of the experiment exposed participants to Miller's profile before they read his article, it was not possible to test the effect of news perceptions on journalist perceptions. In addition, whereas the magnitude of effects could differ depending on each journalist's tone or style of self-disclosure and interaction (e.g., formal vs. informal; humorous vs. nonhumorous), this study employed a certain (i.e., formal and gentle) style of self-disclosure and interaction which seems to be most common.

Finally, as a personal and transparent approach is becoming a norm in new journalism paradigms (Lasorsa, 2012), the traditional objectivity norm might be becoming less vital than being relatable to audiences. It is not known yet whether the personal or professional-dimension perception of journalists is more crucial to audiences. Future studies should investigate which dimension guides audiences' decisions to follow them or to consume their news product.

It should be also noted that social media are part of a wider media ecosystem. Some audiences may be already familiar with a journalist's work before they visit his or her social media profile and those preformed impressions will influence their evaluations. However, such factors were excluded in this experiment by using a fictitious journalist to focus on the effect of self-disclosure and interaction.

Nonetheless, the present study contributes to the field of journalism and computer-mediated communication. First, in terms of theory, it brought the interpersonal communication perspectives—uncertainty reduction theory, expectancy-violation theory, and SIP perspective—to journalism research. Today's news experiences should be understood as masspersonal communication in which interpersonal communication components play an important role in regard to audience perception and evaluation of news. By treating audiences not as passive news consumers but as social information processors who actively utilize available cues to make sense of information providers, this study provides an opportunity to understand current news environments from different viewpoints.

Methodologically, the experimental design of the present study enabled the testing of causal relationships which was not possible in studies based on content analysis or surveys. The results demonstrate that journalists' social media activities can *cause* both positive and negative results. Another methodological strength of this study lies in its adoption of multiple stimuli approach in which four messages (i.e., articles) were randomly used in each manipulation condition. Jackson and colleagues (1983; 1988) recommended that communication scholars incorporate multiple messages as replications in experiments in order to reduce the incidental confounding problem and draw general conclusions about messages. By manipulating the topic of the news while keeping the same style, format, source, and tone, the present study reduced the possible confounding effects and increased the generalizability of the results. As two distinct contexts were provided in each stimulus (i.e., one link for soft news and one for hard news) in addition to the four article conditions for serious news with financial to political topics, the findings of this study can apply to various contexts in which journalists post news links regardless of the topic of the news.

This study also has significant practical implications. While many journalists and news organizations vaguely anticipate positive promotional effects from using social media, the potential downside is often underestimated and hardly empirically tested. News organizations increasingly warn against the risks of journalists' social media use with guidelines that focus on preventing trash-talking and perceived conflicts of interest (e.g., Associated Press, 2013; Reuter, 2013; The Washington Post, 2011) while encouraging social media use itself. However, the present findings reveal that journalists' social media activities can hurt their professional image even without any serious misbehavior. News organizations should be aware that journalists' social media activity can affect not only the professional reputation of the journalists but also that of their news products. Because this study was conducted with young college students who were likely to be more accustomed to social media norms than to traditional journalism norms, older audiences' reactions might be more negative than positive, as they may not appreciate social media uses as much as younger audiences do.

Overall, this study stands as an opportunity to raise awareness of the implications of journalists' social media activities. As numerous public figures from politicians to media personalities attempt to have a presence in social networks, it is worth recognizing the possible pros and cons of the activity and discussing how to cope with the current masspersonal news environment.

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